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WILLIAM MORRIS

CRAFTSMAN—SOCIALIST

By

HOLBROOK JACKSON

Author of "Bernard Shaw : a Monograph"

Social Reformers Series, No. 3

LONDON

A. C. FIFIELD, 44 FLEET STREET, E.C.

1908

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WILLIAM MORRIS

CRAFTSMAN—SOCIALIST

Introduction

MOST ages produce men who seem specially marked out for leadership, who by sheer force of personality alone impress and convince their fellows into some new line of action or some fresh view of life. In some cases their personalities have a sudden effect, readily convincing large numbers of people, and filling them with eager enthusiasm. Others have a more insinuating way of doing their work; they impress only a very few, and often lead popular opinion into the belief that they are making no impression at all. Of the work of such leaders of thought it may be said that it is not fully born but has to serve a further period of growth in the minds of men before it enters into full orders of practical life. The leadership of William Morris was of a type that partook of some of the qualities of each of these two.

As a teacher he was never without followers, but he never made a *popular* impression upon his age. The impression he made was profound rather than broad. Those who came directly under the influence of his teaching and example were moved to desire nothing better than to devote their whole energies to carrying out his ideals. And he worked so thoroughly and so earnestly himself that his influence cannot but increase as the years go by. Those who were moved by his imagination and zeal, by his skill as a craftsman, and by his eager earnestness as a Socialist, were not confined to any one section of society. They came from all classes, and by good fortune they were in

many cases the people most capable, if not always of actually carrying on his great task, at least of keeping it alive.

Already his name is beginning to stand out among the names of his contemporaries, much as his personality stood out for those who knew and understood him best during his life. The arch-critic, Time, is gradually weeding out the ephemeral persons of that period, revealing in the process this dreamer of dreams as one of the greatest and most practical forces of his day. More important than this is the fact that the work of William Morris is becoming better understood. The dangers which threatened his craft-work, in the imitative popularity of the past few years, like all shallow fashions, is passing away; and the intimate connection between his craftsmanship and his politics is in the way of being properly appreciated, not only by his followers, but by a wider public.

The beautiful things he made are taking their right place in the lives of many people as details and practical examples of a new social order. It is now more clearly understood that these things are not finally objects of fashion, toys and bric-à-brac for rich or idle people, nor "specimens" for art collectors and connoisseurs, but that they are the common objects of daily use which he intended them to be,—the anticipated products of that future state in which he had such abounding faith, when they would be the natural outcome of work done in fellowship and happiness. If William Morris stands for any idea he stands for that; and coming generations will gather strength and inspiration from his life, only as they realize his ideal of the organic relationship between art and conduct.

Chapter I.—Childhood and Youth

WILLIAM MORRIS, born at Elm House, Clay Hill, Walthamstow, on 24 March, 1834, was of Welsh and English descent. His paternal grandfather was a tradesman of Worcester, who married a daughter of Dr. Charles Stanley, a naval surgeon, of Nottingham. His father was born at Worcester, and at the age of twenty-three he went to London, where he entered, and afterwards became a partner in a discount-broking house in the City. Mr. Morris was a keen man of affairs, and his efforts in the firm, together with a successful investment in Cornish copper mines, soon made him a man of means. Shortly after becoming a partner he married Emma Skelton, the daughter of a Worcester family of repute to whom the Morrises were distantly related.

The newly married couple set up house over the business premises in Lombard Street, and here their eldest children, both daughters, were born. In 1833 they removed to Walthamstow, and William Morris was born in the following year. The house was pleasantly situated within two miles of Epping Forest, overlooking the Lea Valley, a district with which the early days of the reformer were closely associated. In 1840, when William was six years old a removal was made across the forest to Woodford Hall, a large Georgian mansion in fifty acres of park, on the high road between London and Epping. The family remained here until 1848, when, on the death of Mr. Morris, they returned to Walthamstow, where they lived at Water House until 1856.

Practically the whole of William Morris's youth was thus spent amid the romantic surroundings of Epping Forest, and the beauty and mystery of its glades of pollarded hornbeam, beech and holly, as well as the large skies and lone distances of the Essex lowlands, entered deep into

his nature. He was quite conscious of the beauty of his surroundings, and when he was away at Marlborough College his imagination always wandered back to Epping. "It is now only seven weeks to the holidays," he wrote to a sister in the earliest extant specimen of his writing; "there I go again! Just like me! always harping on the holidays. I am sure you must think me a great fool to be always thinking about home, but I really can't help it. I don't think it is my fault, for there are such a lot of things I want to do and say and see."

As a child William Morris was delicate, but he soon gained strength in the pure air of Epping. He was studious and retiring, and at a very early age a devoted reader. In fact, neither he nor any member of his family knew exactly when he learnt to read; it would seem to have been a faculty which he acquired by instinct. At the age of four he was reading the Waverley Novels. By the age of seven he had devoured Scott and most of Marryat, and Lane's "Arabian Nights" had become a constant source of joy. At an early age, also, he was impressed by colour and form, and remembered in after life how his childish mind had been moved by a picture of Abraham and Isaac worked in worsted; by Indian cabinets; by a carved ivory junk with gilded puppets; and by "naïf gross ghost stories, read long ago in queer little penny garlands with woodcuts." His love of the pictorial also found food in the beautiful illustrations to Gerard's "Herbal," a copy of which he found among the books of the house. It is probable that the study of this book, as well as his early interest in Heraldry, laid the foundations of many of his later designs. But early as he acquired the reading faculty, he did not learn how to use a pen until much after the usual age, and he never became reliable in his spelling. An instance of this exists in the fact that several sheets of "The Life and Death of Jason" had to be cancelled and reprinted owing to a mistake in the spelling of a simple word, a word so common as to have convinced the printer's reader that Morris's version was intentional.

Up to the age of nine William Morris received no education save an occasional lesson from his sisters' governess.

Then he was sent to a "preparatory school for young gentlemen," kept by two ladies, at first in Walthamstow, when Morris rode backwards and forwards on his pony, and later at Woodford. In 1848, when he was just under fourteen, he entered the then newly-founded Marlborough College near Swindon, remaining there until 1851. In these early years the college was in a state of chaos, there was no organization, insufficient accommodation and funds, and building operations were going on all the time he was there.

The educational system was bad even for those days, but this was of little importance to a genius of the type of Morris. His education went on apart from system. He found the materials in Savernake Forest and on the Downs; in the ancient barrows of Silbury Hill and Pewsey Vale; in the stone circles of Avebury and the Roman Villa at Kennet; in the ancient churches of the district and in the college library, which was fortunately well provided with works on archæology and ecclesiastical architecture. In after years he used to say that he left Marlborough "a good archæologist, and knowing most of what there was to be known about English Gothic." And this was the basis of all his future activities.

The childhood and youth of William Morris were a continuous romance; not a romance of actual deeds, but of coloured dreams. The joys of knight errantry were his as he raced about Woodford Hall upon his pony clad in a suit of toy armour. Wherever he was he recreated his surroundings out of his own visions. He roamed over Epping and Savernake pondering deeply upon the life of those beautiful places, giving them for himself and for those who then had his confidence, and for those who have since read his books, a new significance. The backgrounds of many of his finest romances are records of the impressions of these days. At school he was not noted for sport, nor, in the ordinary way, for study. He played his own game of life and had his own intellectual method. He had a violent temper, and was thought a little mad by his schoolfellows, who, nevertheless, were not averse to listening to his endless stories about knights and fairies. He had the usual boyish

enthusiasm for silkworms and birds' eggs, but generally he turned to books and to Nature in her broadest sense. Even in these early days the intense activity of hand and brain, which so characterized his whole life, began to show itself. It is recorded how his fingers must ever be handling something ; and a story is told of how he gained relief from this restlessness by endless netting. " With one end of the net fastened to a desk in the big schoolroom he would work at it for hours together, his fingers moving almost automatically."

It was decided that he should study for the Church, and, upon leaving Marlborough College, he read at home with a private tutor till he was able to go up to Oxford for matriculation. The bent of his mind and imagination at this time, his love not only of medieval architecture and old churches and church music, but of the very spirit of medievalism, pointed to the Church as his natural vocation. His tutor was the Rev. F. B. Guy, afterwards Canon of St. Alban's, a man of similar tastes and sympathies to those of his pupil. Morris went up to Oxford in June, 1852, and matriculated at Exeter College. It was during the examination in the Hall of Exeter that he first met Edward Burne-Jones.

Chapter II.—Oxford Days

WILLIAM MORRIS entered into residence at Exeter College, Oxford, in 1853, and took his Bachelor's degree in 1856; it was during these three years that the curve of his future life was determined. Oxford, of all cities, was the one most likely to develop such a nature as his. The romance and life of the Middle Ages in which he had steeped his mind, survived in the noble building of the place, feeding his imagination with just that sense of reality he required. The new-found fellowship with Edward Burne-Jones, which was to grow into one of the memorable friendships of modern biography, gave him for the first time in life a full and intimate companionship in tastes and ideals.

He was already familiar with the poems of Tennyson, and he had read with enthusiasm the early volumes of "Modern Painters."

The ideas to which he was introduced by this book were to be augmented and turned into something like a religion when Ruskin published "The Stones of Venice." The epoch-making chapter called "The Nature of Gothic" became a bible for him, and years afterwards he reverently printed it on the Kelmscott Press. The teachings of Charles Kingsley and Frederick Denison Maurice also had their influence, as well as those of Carlyle. But after Ruskin no books held Morris so firmly and meant so much to him, both then and afterwards, as Chaucer's poems and Malory's "Morte d'Arthur."

Burne-Jones and Morris, so far as their own college was concerned, lived very much to themselves. But the former had a circle of Birmingham friends at Pembroke College. Morris became one of this group of ardent souls, which included, besides Burne-Jones and himself, William Fulford, Cormell Price, Harry Macdonald, and Richard

Watson (afterwards Canon) Dixon. They came to be known among themselves as "the set," and later on as the Brotherhood. Their aim at first was the application of religious and philosophical ideas to life, and there was serious talk of Morris founding and endowing a monastery wherein they might follow the ideals they had set for themselves—ideals largely evolved out of their enthusiasm for Ruskin, Carlyle, and Tennyson.

But this desire never came to anything, because Morris soon realized those leanings towards art, always latent, and which eventually determined the true course of his life. On his coming of age he inherited a fortune of something under £1000 a year. At this time he was still bent upon Holy Orders; but gradually he discovered that he could better express his mission in life by weaving his imagination into works of art. At this period Morris was an aristocrat with monastic and humanitarian ideals.

He was healthy, tireless in the work he loved, busy with modern ideas and studies of ancient, particularly medieval times; playful, athletic, with an amazing amount of special knowledge and compelling enthusiasms.

There are two contemporary descriptions of him at about this time. The earlier is by Burne-Jones. "From the first I knew how different he was from all the men I had ever met." He says: "He talked with vehemence and sometimes with violence. I never knew him languid or tired. He was slight in figure in those days; his hair was dark brown and very thick, his nose straight, his eyes hazel-coloured, his mouth exceedingly delicate and beautiful." This portrait is confirmed by Canon Dixon, writing a year or two later, who says: "At this time Morris was an aristocrat and a High Churchman. His manners and tastes and sympathies were all aristocratic. His countenance was beautiful in features and expression, particularly in the expression of purity. Occasionally it had a melancholy look. He had a finely cut mouth, the short upper lip adding greatly to the purity of expression. I have a vivid recollection of the splendid beauty of his expression at this time."

In 1854 he visited Belgium and Northern France. On

this journey he made the acquaintance of some of the noblest examples of Gothic architecture the world has to show, and the impression made upon him by the superb churches of Amiens, Beauvais, and Chartres was profound and lasting. The following year Morris, Burne-Jones, and Fulford went on a walking tour through Normandy, revisiting some of the memorable places and making many new acquaintances among the wonderful architecture of that country. But this journey was memorable for another reason. The talks and impressions of the tour found expression on the return journey in the decision of Morris and Burne-Jones to abandon all ideas of taking Holy Orders and henceforth to follow art. They arrived at this conclusion one August night on the quay at Havre. Burne-Jones was to be a painter, Morris an architect.

Before the tour, however, Morris had discovered that he could write. In the winter of 1854 he read Burne-Jones his first poem. Of this event writes Canon Dixon: "One night Crom Price and I went to Exeter and found him with Burne-Jones. As soon as we entered the room Burne-Jones exclaimed wildly, "He's a big poet!" "Who is?" asked we. "Why, Topsy!" This is the name, sometimes shortened to Top, which had been given him because of his wild curly hair. This first poem was called "The Willow and the Red Cliff." His friends were full of enthusiasm. "Well," said Morris, "if this is poetry, it is very easy to write;" and for some time afterwards he presented his friend with a new poem almost daily. Later, he found out that he could write prose, and he wrote those prose romances which are unequalled in our language for their luxuriant beauty of thought, magic of imagery, and unique knowledge of medieval archæology.

The Brotherhood had long wanted a medium for the expression of its aspirations, so with the financial aid of Morris and the intellectual co-operation of kindred spirits in Cambridge as well as Oxford, the "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine" was founded in 1856, with Morris as editor, a position he yielded to Fulford before the second number appeared. Twelve monthly numbers in all were printed,

when decreasing circulation forced them to discontinue the magazine. The "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," however, stands with the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, "The Germ," as one of the most notable products of a new era in English literature. In its pages not only appeared the earliest work of Morris, but three poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with whose work and personality the former had recently become acquainted.

Indeed, the incident which confirmed Morris and Burne-Jones in their intentions of becoming artists, came about through the latter's introduction to Rossetti at about this time. Both, like most people who came within his sphere, fell under the spell of this powerful and unique personality. It gave a quality to the art of Burne-Jones which it never lost, and it eventually drew Morris away from architecture, as a profession, for ever. Morris articled himself to the architect Street, and entered his office in Beaumont Street, Oxford, in January, 1856. There he met Philip Webb, who became a life-long friend and, through this connection, Norman Shaw. It was these three men who inaugurated the renaissance of domestic architecture in England.

Chapter III.—From Craftsmanship to Socialism

MORRIS'S career as an architect was of short duration, for before the first year was out he had abandoned the profession for ever. But by this time he had settled with Burne-Jones in London, having come up when Street removed from Oxford. In 1857 the two friends took the rooms at 17 Red Lion Square, which had been occupied by Rossetti and Deverell in the early days of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and this was to be their home until the spring of 1859. Morris had before this been drawn towards designing, and it was his early skill in that art and his love of the craft-work of the Middle Ages, coupled with the necessity of having to furnish their rooms, that his life as the revolutionist of taste in domestic furniture began. The crafts of cabinet-making and upholstery had become so degraded that Morris could actually buy nothing in keeping with his taste—so his practical genius came into play, and he had what he wanted made to his own designs. To the rooms in Red Lion Square came Rossetti, and in his commanding and irresistible way added his genius to that of Morris and Burne-Jones in the decoration of the furniture.

Morris now turned to painting and designing with all his ardour. "In all illumination and work of that kind," Rossetti wrote in 1856, "he is quite unrivalled by anything modern I know." In 1857 he painted his first picture. It was a subject in oils taken from the "Morte d'Arthur"; and in the same year he did his first and only picture in water-colour, whilst staying with Dixon at Manchester. In this year also Morris joined Rossetti in that high-spirited but ill-considered scheme for the decoration of the ceiling of the then new debating hall (now the library) of the Union Society at Oxford. Rooms were taken at Oxford, and the old friends of the Brotherhood pressed into the service.

Rossetti had also secured the help of Burne-Jones, Arthur Hughes, Spencer Stanhope, Val Prinsep, and Hungerford Pollen. After the decoration of the Hall was finished, Morris remained at Oxford in rooms at 17 George Street, where the painters and their friends had spent so many happy hours during the work at the Union Hall.

Some of the happiest days of his life were spent in London during the few months preceding the painting of the Union Hall ceiling. He was one of the Rossetti circle, which included all that was vital and capable in the art of the period, coupled with enthusiasm and a picturesque Bohemianism. In 1858 he painted "Queen Guenevere," the only completed painting of his now known to be extant; and in the early months of the year his first volume of poems, "The Defence of Guenevere," appeared. His stay in Oxford, however, caused a break with this circle, although he paid London periodical visits, and he visited France twice that year, once with Faulkner and Webb in August, rowing down the Seine from Paris in a boat imported from Oxford, and on another occasion alone to buy manuscripts, armour, ironwork, and enamel. But all this time, although he painted diligently, his mind dwelt upon other things. He gradually realized that the pursuit of a single art was not for him. The idea of the relationship of all the arts in the building, not only of houses beautiful but of cities beautiful, was clamouring for expression.

His stay in Oxford at this time was probably not entirely disinterested. In the long vacation of 1857 Rossetti and Burne-Jones had become acquainted with a lady, one of the daughters of Mr. Robert Burden, of Oxford, whose remarkable beauty so strongly resembled the type familiar to everybody now through Rossetti's pictures, that the young painters persuaded her to sit to them. She attracted William Morris in another way, and on 26 April, 1859, he and Jane Burden were married at the parish church of St. Michael's, Oxford. The ceremony was performed by Dixon, who had become curate of St. Mary's, Lambeth, with Faulkner as best man, and Burne-Jones and other friends present. This proved to be the closing event in the life of the Oxford Brotherhood.

William Morris and his wife settled in furnished rooms at 41 Great Ormond Street, London, during the building of their new home at Upton, in Kent. Morris had combined his ideas of a home with the most cherished ideas of his art and life, and the result was not only the turning-point of his own career, but the turning-point in the history of English domestic architecture. For just as he had found it difficult, in fact, impossible, to furnish rooms from the commercial furniture stores, he found it doubly impossible to furnish a complete house to his taste, and his life-long sense of the essential relationship between architecture and decoration forced to the front the idea of building his own house.

The house, called Red House, was duly built by Philip Webb. It was an L-shaped building of two stories, with a high-pitched roof of red tiles, "thus violating all the contemporary canons of squareness, stucco, and slate." The decorations were the work of Morris and his friends, and most of the furniture was designed by Webb and specially made under his instructions. They entered into occupation of the house in 1860, with the full intention of making it their permanent home, but owing to matters of health they had to leave the beautiful house after having spent in it the five happiest years of their life. It was here that their two children, both girls, were born.

The building of Red House and the problems of decoration and furniture it raised, coupled with Morris's deepening interest in craftsmanship, ultimately resulted in the foundation of the epoch-making firm of Morris and Co. The original members of the firm were William Morris, Philip Webb, C. J. Faulkner, Ford Madox Brown, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, P. P. Marshall, a surveyor and sanitary engineer, and Arthur Hughes, who withdrew from the company before the firm was registered. Premises were taken at No. 8 Red Lion Square, near to Morris and Burne-Jones's old rooms, and business started in April, 1861, under the title of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., with a capital of one hundred pounds, borrowed from Mrs. Morris the elder, and a call of one pound per share from each member of the company.

The object of the firm was to make and supply everything that was needed in the decoration and furnishing of a house, as well as such luxurious things as jewellery; but in the early days of its existence more attention was paid to ecclesiastical decoration. Thus began the revival of the crafts in England, and that revolution in architecture and decoration which is still going on. In this concern the immense energy of Morris had full play, and he rapidly developed into a complete craftsman, who could turn his hand with masterly effect to any kind of work. Gradually the whole initiative of the firm devolved upon him and, with the gradual secession of the partners, the business came entirely into his hands. In 1865, when the Morrises were forced to give up their beautiful Red House, they took the house No. 26 Queen Square, and to this place, for the sake of convenience and economy, the business of Morris and Co. was removed from Red Lion Square. Later, a show-room in Oxford Street, and a workshop at Merton Abbey (both still occupied by the proprietors of the firm), were taken.

In 1871, by a happy chance, he was able to take that beautiful house on a backwater of the Upper Thames, which was to be his beloved country home for the next twenty-five years. He had been living with growing discontent in Bloomsbury, when he came across an advertisement of Kelmscott Manor House in an estate agent's list. It was such a house as must have occupied his dreams. It lies on a little stream at the end of the remote and ancient village of Kelmscott, in Oxfordshire, some three miles by field-path and winding cart-road from Lechlade; an irregular cluster of grey gables, with mullioned and small-leaded windows and tiled roofs of the same colour as the buildings, with the tiles beautifully graded like the scales of a fish, and all overgrown with golden lichen, blending wonderfully with the varied greens of the creepers, the trees, and the great dark yew hedge which dominates the gardens. Morris loved this old house, which blended so well with his life and ideals, and he has celebrated it in perfect prose in the final chapter of "News from Nowhere."

He saw little of Kelmscott during the first year of his

tenancy, which was jointly held by him and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The previous year he had finished "The Earthly Paradise," and he had been waiting to get this off his hands before taking a long-contemplated trip to Iceland. Next to his love of the medieval crafts, the buildings and countryside of Southern England and Northern France, there was nothing which attracted him more completely than the Sagas of Scandinavia and the virile lives of the people of the North. The proposed journey to Iceland filled him with boyish delight, and it is recounted by the children of Burne-Jones how he came one day and practised the life of a backwoodsman by building in their garden a stove of loose bricks over which he cooked a stew. He and three friends, including Mr. Eiríkr Magnússon, who afterwards collaborated with him in translating the Icelandic Sagas, left for Iceland in July, 1871, and he arrived back in England again towards the end of September. A second journey to Iceland was made in 1873.

The next few years were occupied with the business of "the firm," and with translations of the smaller Icelandic Sagas and the Æneids of Virgil, with the writing of "Love is Enough" and "Sigurd the Volsung," and with the craft of writing and decorating books on vellum. Of these he produced many beautiful specimens, including copies of some of his own poems and translations, and Fitzgerald's version of "The Rubáiyát" of Omar Khayyám. He had taken a small house at Turnham Green, and between this and the workshops in Queen's Square and Kelmscott Manor House he spent most of his time. Besides this he found time to go down to Leek, in Staffordshire, to learn the craft of dyeing and to revive the manufacture of honest and durable dyes, Strained relations had existed for some time among the members of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., and the partnership was dissolved in March, 1875, Morris becoming the sole proprietor of the concern, which since then has been carried on under the name of Morris and Co. Constant friction had existed between Morris and Rossetti before this, and the latter had finally left Kelmscott, to Morris's great relief, in the preceding summer. The attachment between these two dominant personalities

was completely broken over the transactions connected with the dissolution.

William Morris had never followed, or dreamt of following, the reclusive life of the man of letters, and even less did he anticipate the unsecluded but more private career of the business man. Literature was always a by-product of a life that constantly tended towards expression and consummation in the broader current of social affairs. The firm of Morris and Co. was not a business, it was a social movement. His art meant nothing to him, unless it bore a direct relationship with the life around him. In the broadest possible manner he was a Socialist, and his Socialism, long before it became a conscious political aim, found expression in the essential communal spirit of his demand for a revival of handicraft, in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, which he founded in 1877, and in the enthusiasm and money he threw into the Eastern Questions Association at about the same time.

In 1878 he took the old Georgian house on the Upper Mall, Hammersmith, which he renamed Kelmscott House, and which he occupied until his death. Many of his activities had their centre here. In one of the rooms he set up a loom, where he taught himself the art of weaving in his spare time. The house was decorated by him throughout, and many of the treasures of the Red House found a resting-place here. Later, when he joined the Socialist Movement, the coach-house was turned into a lecture hall for the use of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. He loved to think that the broad river which flowed past his windows was the same Thames that lapped the meadows of his beautiful Manor House 130 miles above Hammersmith, and occasionally he would charter a boat and take his family and some friends by water to Kelmscott.

Morris's workshops and his public life seemed to grow side by side. The constant addition of departments made it necessary to look for larger premises for the workshops, and these were eventually found at Merton Abbey, in Surrey. This growth of the business was forced upon him by reason of his inability to procure the quality of

material demanded by him from ordinary manufacturers. In this way Morris and Co. grew from a firm of decorators into a firm of craftsmen, making stained glass, tapestry, carpets, embroidery, tiles, furniture, printed cotton goods, wall papers, furniture velvets, and other fabrics and upholstery. Practically the same causes drove him forth as a lecturer. He lectured on art and handicraft and the preservation of ancient buildings, not only in London, but in many provincial towns; and in 1882 he gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction.

Still, during this period William Morris led a life that would have been lonely had it not been so fully concentrated upon his work and his ideas. He was at the parting of the ways with many of his old habits and associates. Hitherto what political activity he had displayed was connected with the National Liberal League, but in the early 'eighties he was more and more drawn towards Socialism, until on 13 January, 1883, on the same day on which his old college at Oxford had unanimously elected him to an honorary fellowship, he joined the Democratic Federation which had recently been formed for the propagation of Socialism.

Chapter IV.—Last Years

HE looked upon his acceptance of Socialism as an act of renunciation. His membership card, which was endorsed by H. H. Champion, bore the legend, "William Morris, designer." He was henceforth a workman and not a member of the middle class. He worked hard for the Federation, lecturing all over England, contributing both literature and funds to "Justice," its official organ; and in May 1883 he was elected a member of its Executive Committee.

This went on for two years, when differences as to policy brought about a split with Hyndman. Morris formed the Socialist League in 1884 with an organ of its own, called "The Commonweal," which he ran himself, and to which he contributed, besides other matter, "The Dream of John Ball" and "News from Nowhere." The League prospered for many years, and in spite of many differences with his fellow-members, Morris remained a member until 1890, and managed "The Commonweal" until he was deposed in 1889.

But some years previous to these events he had been drawn again more intimately into literature and art. In 1887 he published his translation of the "Odyssey," and in 1889 the two first of his prose romances, "The House of the Wolfings" and "The Roots of the Mountains." The example of his work at Merton Abbey had been having its effect upon many young artists and craftsmen, and he eventually threw his energies into the Arts and Crafts Movement as organized by such men as Walter Crane, Professor Lethaby, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Emery Walker, and others. He joined the Art Worker's Guild, and afterwards the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, became less and less a militant Socialist, and devoted

most of his lectures purely to questions of art in relation to industry and life in general.

In 1890 "The Story of the Glittering Plain" appeared in the "English Illustrated Magazine," and "News from Nowhere" was issued in paper covers for one shilling. In the same year Morris busied himself with what was to be the final work of his active and productive life—the Kelmscott Press. His love of beautiful books found expression, as all his desires did sooner or later, in the wish to produce beautiful books. He secured the co-operation of Mr. Emery Walker and Mr. T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, and designed types and initials and ornaments, and by the beginning of 1891 the Kelmscott Press was established in premises on the Upper Mall, Hammersmith, just above Kelmscott House. The first book printed on the press was Morris's own "Story of the Glittering Plain."

Almost coincidental with the establishment of the Kelmscott Press the signs of the illness, which was to have a fatal termination five years later, appeared. That summer he went for a short tour in Northern France with his daughter Jenny, and in the autumn he commenced publishing his translations of the Icelandic Sagas. The remaining years of his life were full of the old activity. He fought for the causes he had at heart and worked unceasingly. He protested against the restorations at Peterborough Cathedral, St. Mark's, Venice, and the taming of Epping Forest. Several journeys were taken to the provinces for the purpose of lectures, and another trip to Northern France.

But most of the time of these last years was occupied with the Kelmscott Press. This was his last, and in many ways his greatest, enthusiasm. Masterpiece by masterpiece fell from the great press as his years ebbed out, and in the spare hours of their superintendence he wrote prose romances. On the death of Tennyson, in 1892, he was approached by a member of Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet in reference to the vacant Laureatship. William Morris was pleased with the implied honour, but he made it quite clear that he could not accept such an office. He spoke a few words at the funeral of the Socialist, Serglus Stepniak,

in 1894, and in January of the following year he spoke for the last time in public at a meeting of the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising.

The two most important works of these last months of his life were the completion of the Kelmscott "Chaucer," which had been in process of construction in one way and another for some five years, and which had been a year and nine months in printing, and his last prose romance, "The Sundering Flood." Each was strangely typical of his life and his impending end. His whole career was a practical embodiment of the spirit and task of the period of Chaucer, and his poems were, in more ways than one, a modern reflection of the genius of the "Canterbury Pilgrims." The Chaucer was finished on 2 June, 1896, and two copies were ready for him on his return from Sussex, where he had been spending a few days in search of health with his friend Mr. Wilfrid Blunt. One of these copies was for himself, the other for his life-long friend Burne-Jones, who had contributed eighty-seven pictures to the great book.

His health grew rapidly worse, and the splendid energy of the craftsman and poet began to flag. A voyage to the North Cape was advised and taken. He left London on 22 July, and arrived back at Tilbury on 18 August. The voyage had done no good, and his one desire now was to get away to Kelmscott. But he was never to see his beautiful country home again. His illness took a serious turn, and he went to Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, where he died on the morning of Saturday, 3 October.

On 6 October he was buried in the little churchyard of Kelmscott. It was a bright, windy day following a night of storm. The roads were strewn with leaves, and the orchards with fallen apples. The coffin was borne from Lechlade station upon one of the Kelmscott farm wagons. There was no display of mourning for this man who had lived so worthily and worked so well. The farm wagon was one of the yellow-bodied, red-wheeled vehicles of the locality; it was wreathed with vine and willow and carpeted with green moss, and the unpolished oak coffin, with its handles of wrought iron, was covered with a

treasured piece of Broussa brocade, upon which was laid a wreath of bay. "With the family and friends," writes Mr. J. W. Mackail, "were mingled workmen from Merton Abbey and Oxford Street, comrades of the Socialist League, pupils of the Art Worker's Guild, and Kelmscott villagers in their working dress. There was no pomp of organized mourning, and the ceremony was of the shortest and simplest. Among the associates and followers of later years were the few survivors of that remarkable fellowship which had founded the Oxford Brotherhood and the firm of Red Lion Square; and at the head of the grave Sir Edward Burne-Jones, the closest and the first friend of all, stood and saw a great part of his own life lowered into earth."

Chapter V. — Craftsmanship

I. The Idea of Handicraft

THE position occupied by William Morris among the great men of the last century was that of one who accepted the intimation of an inner vision of beauty and used it as a challenge to the triumphant ugliness of the day. By that vision he threw down the gage, and ever afterwards carried on a kind of holy warfare in favour of joy and beauty. He saw the drab chaos of our big towns and the dull lives led by their vast populations, and he strove to show how it was possible for men to work happily together and to make the products of their hands both seemly and useful. He saw that men took no joy of their work, and little pleasure in the things they made. There was no depth or fine quality to life, and no margin to the page of existence. All experiences were treated in deference to mercenary standards, and it was asked of all things not whether they were good or useful or beautiful, but whether they were marketable. Without this last they were ignored. Yet, in the midst of it all, he saw that men wanted leisure, and that the senses of decency and beauty were not dead, but merely stunted through long disuse.

The war he waged was not a war of destruction. He sought to vanquish a sordid and ugly world by building up a generous and beautiful one. Beautiful things were to be made that would in themselves change the world, that would not only be so beautiful as to give significance to their mean and ugly surroundings, but that would have the effect of making men feel this meanness and desire to undo it. By virtue of a rare imagination, coupled with tireless practical and administrative ability, he made the renaissance of such beauty a possibility, and although he

did not live to see more than the merest practical beginnings of his life-work, the seeds sown by him must increase and multiply until they realize the Utopia of his dreams.

William Morris was Ruskin in practice. He never claimed originality for his ideas, and was never weary of owning John Ruskin as his master. Rarely has human being possessed the ability of expression in so many forms. He will be remembered as the motive force behind a number of activities, each of which gained in power and beauty by association with the magic of his personality. But although his work was in many forms, it represented a decided and homogeneous whole, closely and intimately related with his ideals of a new social order. Without this organic relationship between his art and his ideas, those beautiful productions which bear the mark of his genius are no more than the objects of any fashion of a moment. Whether as weaver or decorator, printer or painter, his work is a constant and deliberate protest against cheapness, and an assertion of the principle of production for use against the prevalent one of production for profit. It is an appeal to society to take up the half-forgotten traditions of the pre-commercial age, to go back for its ideals to an age which was interested in what it made, not because of any monetary profit that might accrue therefrom, but because it desired what it produced for its own use, and took a sane joy in the effort of making things that were to be a part of its daily life.

The avowed aim of Morris as a craftsman was to apply and amplify the principles of art laid down by Ruskin in the chapter of "The Stones of Venice" called "The Nature of Gothic." He considered that essay one of the most important of its author's works, and "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century." The essence of its teaching was the principle that art is the expression of man's joy in his work. At the same time the theories of Morris were not entirely derived from Ruskin; he was derivative only in the sense of having been awakened to the main bent of his genius by the

teachings of Ruskin. There was an affinity between the two men which was, quite naturally, first revealed by the elder. This affinity was almost complete, but it broke down in one essential. Morris, " born out of his due time," as he cried, child of the Middle Ages as he undoubtedly was, was yet never so consistent a medievalist as Ruskin. He would go back to the Middle Ages with him for the lost traditions of art, but beyond that his medievalism did not go. Ruskin's love of even the best days of Feudalism did not convince Morris of the desirability of their revival. The traditions of art lay in the past, but the traditions of society in the future. Ruskin called himself a Tory of the old type ; Morris was a Socialist.

Morris based his theory that art was the expression of man's joy in his work, on his own desire for happiness, which he could not help believing was a universal desire. He argued that his life was under the influence of two dominating moods, which he called the mood of energy and the mood of idleness. These two moods, now one, then the other, were always crying out to be satisfied. The mood of energy could only be satisfied by action, that of idleness by memory of pleasurable experiences, of things, or places. He found also that whilst the mood of idleness amused him, that of energy gave him hope. And he believed that all men's lives were compounded of these two moods. From this he deduced that the aim of art was to administer to these moods, first by giving men pleasurable means for the expression of their energy, and by thus producing beautiful things giving them worthy objects for joy in idleness. Further, he says :—

" I believe that art cannot be the result of external compulsion ; the labour which goes to produce it is voluntary, and partly undertaken for the labour itself, partly for the sake of the hope of producing something which, when done, shall give pleasure to the users of it. Or, again, this extra labour, when it *is* extra, is undertaken with the aim of satisfying that mood of energy by employing it to produce something worth doing, and which, therefore, will keep before the worker a lively hope while he is working, and also by giving it work to do in which there is absolute

immediate pleasure. Perhaps it is difficult to explain to the non-artistic capacity that this definite sensuous pleasure is always pleasant in the handicraft work of the deft workman when he is working successfully, and that it increases in proportion to the freedom and individuality of the work. Also, you must understand that this production of art, and consequent pleasure in work, is not confined to the production of matters which are works of art only, like pictures, statues, and so forth, but has been and should be a part of all labour in some form or other: so only will the claims of the mood of energy be satisfied.

"Therefore the aim of art is to increase the happiness of men, by giving them beauty and interest of incident to amuse their leisure, and prevent them wearying even of rest, and by giving them hope and bodily pleasure in their work; or, shortly, to make man's work happy and his rest fruitful."*

The essential qualities of art were decoration and design. The form itself was to be beautiful in so far as its design accorded with Nature. It must not only look as if it had, as it were, grown under man's hands, but also that it could go on growing; or, rather, that it would neither impede nor ever look out of place amidst that "constant state of becoming" which is life. Decoration was the final expression of the artist's appreciation of, and happiness in, his work under these conditions, and the expression of his desire to give others pleasure in the work of his hands. "To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce *use*, that is the great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce *make*, that is the use of it."†

The acceptance of this theory rules out of court for all time the prevalent tendencies towards the separation of art from the common current of life. It turns art from a private into a public, from an exclusive into a popular thing. And it invites, nay, necessitates, the happy co-operation of the whole community in its production.

* "*Signs of Change*" (1888), *p.* 121.
† "*Hopes and Fears for Art*" (1882), *p.* 4.

Art must become, as it was at one time, architectonic, or, in other words, organically related and subservient to the master-craft of architecture. Morris had no sympathy with any art which did not fall under this law. The only genuine art was applied art. Every art product must have some definite relationship with the house and the public building. Painting was more and more to take its place as an adjunct to architecture; it was to become mural, putting the final touches to the builder's work in glowing frescoes. Sculpture was to be the blossoming in foliation and figure of the stonework of homestead, workshop, or meeting-place. These were parts of the decorative expression of the artist's work. Just as he would decorate the surface of a cup or a vase, a woven fabric or a printed cloth. He carried his love of applied art even into music, in which he showed no interest except in the form of folk-song and old church music, where harmony and melody are woven into labours and devotions of the people.

But if art were to render superfluous the maker of refined and useless things, bric-à-brac, articles of vertu, platform music, and easel pictures, it would more certainly limit the mechanic and the machine to reducing the drudgery of life to a minimum. Instead of the artist, as we now understand him, living a pampered or neglected life according to the measure of success he has obtained in making things which are complete in themselves and bearing only the slightest relationship to the activities of life, we shall have the craftsman. He will make things for use, which shall be so beautiful that any ornaments apart from them will be unnecessary. But the craftsman will not be an exclusive person like the artist; he will be the common worker, no longer the slave of a machine, but taking a joy in the work of his hands into which he weaves his vision of the world, and by which he expresses and interprets the wonder and mystery of life.

William Morris realized fully the tendency of modern society to standardize all production, and he rightly saw in this fact the destruction, not of happiness alone, but of individuality. The artist has become the dependent of a

few powerful persons; he ministers to their exclusive tastes, whilst the great body of the people toil at the duplication of utilities which are largely rendered useless and dangerous by imitation and adulteration. Morris demanded for each individual the right to express his own personality in the things he makes, and he looked upon the factory and the machine as tyrants, as dangerous as the owners of slaves, the destruction of individuality being as great in each case. His gospel of work is a demand for the freedom of personal expression. In his own words :—

" The hope of pleasure in the work itself: how strange that hope must seem to some of my readers—to most of them! Yet I think that to all living things there is a pleasure in the exercise of their energies, and that even beasts rejoice in being lithe and swift and strong. But a man at work, making something which he feels will exist because he is working at it and wills it, is exercising the energies of his mind and soul as well as his body. Memory and imagination help him as he works. Not only his own thoughts, but the thoughts of the men of past ages guide his hands; and, as a part of the human race, he creates. If we work thus we shall be men, and our days will be happy and eventful."

Throughout his life this view of art was a part of his very existence. It wove itself into his imagination as he roamed the hornbeam glades of Epping Forest as a child; it filled him with wonder, later on, at Marlborough College, when he devoted hours, usually spent in play or study, to the contemplation of the medieval survivals in the architecture of that neighbourhood; and later, when he found opportunities of visiting Normandy and Flanders, the wonders of craftsmanship in Rouen, in Amiens, and in Bruges deepened still more his consciousness of the need for a renaissance of art co-operate with work. His intense love and deep understanding of medieval architecture and craftsmanship can be traced through all his writings, from their beginnings in his imaginative contributions to the " Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," in 1856, down through poem, romance, and essay, to the inspiring practical lectures of his later years—lectures given to art workers

in London, Birmingham, Burslem, and elsewhere, to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and to innumerable Socialist and Reform organizations all over the country.

The dominant note in all these impressions and utterances is the high value he sets upon the work produced under the Guilds of the Middle Ages. The craft-guilds represented a constant growth towards the control of labour under the most sincere and honest conditions known to history, and, down to their hour of supremacy in the beginning of the fourteenth century, they were quite democratic in constitution. There were no mere journeymen, and apprentices were sure, as a matter of course, to take their places as masters of the craft when they had learned it. William Morris, however, never actually advocated the restoration of the guild system, although there is no doubt that he would in a large measure have supported the claims for some such restoration of craft organization as that advocated more recently by Mr. A. J. Penty in his much-discussed book on that subject.*

The three main arguments advanced by Morris in favour of the mediæval tradition in production in addition to the insistence laid by the guilds upon soundness of material and deftness of craftsmanship, were: (1) *Absence of division of labour;* giving the craftsman an interest in the actual and complete article he was making, instead of, as nowadays, in only one part of it, as for instance in, say, the making of tables, where the craftsman of the past would be a maker of actual tables and not, like his descendant, the modern cabinet-maker, a maker of one part of a table. Or, again, in the making of boots, where the division of labour is emphasized in the fact that in the ordinary factory-made boot no worker makes the complete article; some devote their lives to making "uppers," others to fitting these on to the "soles," and so forth. Under such conditions there can be no full interest, and therefore no pleasure in the final form of an

* "*The Restoration of the Gild System.*" *By Arthur J. Penty.* 1906.

article. The worker is robbed of the joy that follows his consciousness of the organic relationship of the results of his labour, and his work deteriorates accordingly. (2) *The direct relationship between craftsman and consumer;* the craftsman, being thus enabled to consider the personal needs of his customer, and so to weave into his labour the pleasure of the ultimate user with that of his own pleasure as maker of the article. (3) *The local nature of craftsmanship*; that is, the production in one district, or one country, of all articles that the resources of the locality make practicable. Thus saving cost of transport, and adding to the personality of the craftsman the distinction of environment. It was these three incidents of craftsmanship which gave in a large measure the beauty, the naturalness, and the wonderful proportion to the objects produced under the guilds of the Middle Ages. Speaking of the breaking up of this system, Morris said :—

" What I wish you chiefly to note and remember is this, that the men of the Renaissance lent all their energies, consciously or unconsciously, to the severance of art from the daily lives of men, and that they brought it to pass, if not utterly in their own days, yet speedily and certainly. I must remind you, though I, and better men than I, have said it over and over again, that once every man that made anything made it a work of art besides a useful piece of goods, whereas now only a very few things have even the most distant claim to be considered works of art. I beg you to consider that most carefully and seriously, and to try to think what it means. But first, lest any of you doubt it, let me ask you what forms the great mass of the objects that fill our museums, setting aside positive pictures and sculpture ? Is it not just the common household goods of past time ? True it is that some people may look upon them simply as curiosities, but you and I have been taught most properly to look upon them as priceless treasures that can teach us all sorts of things, and yet, I repeat, they are for the most part common household goods, wrought by ' common fellows,' as people say now, without any cultivation, men who thought

the sun went round the earth, and that Jerusalem was exactly in the middle of the world." *

The lesson William Morris would have us learn from a fragment of domestic crockery handed down to us from those remote days, when " common " men built the great minsters, and the noble manor houses, and simple, yet dignified cottages of England, is that it was the same spirit which guided alike the hand and brain of the potter as that which moved the masons to pile stone on stone and build edifices which are still the glory and pleasure of mankind. The household utensil, no less than the great east window of York Minster; the tapestry in the baronial hall, no less than the many-coloured walls of St. Mark's at Venice, were but parts of one great popular art. The aim of Morris was to co-ordinate and give modern significance to that art.

A true architectural work was not the mere walls and roof of a building as we understand that word, but a building provided with all the necessary furniture, and decorated according to the quality and nature of the structure. Further than this, architecture was the great composite art which expressed both man's value of life and made life of value to him. His history was worked into its very stones, his traditions and attainments were recorded in its decorations. Every building erected in the true spirit of architecture was the expression of the aspirations and needs of the race. But to have this true spirit it must have been founded on the happy work of the most useful part of the population. And work as he did towards a rehabilitation of this essential spirit, Morris was under no illusion as to the practicability of its revival under present commercial conditions. What he advocated, what he worked for, was the renaissance of the spirit of Gothic art, and that, in his own words, could only come about in its completeness, " as a part of a change as wide and deep as that which destroyed Feudalism."

* "*Art and the Beauty of the Earth*" (1881), *p.* 11.

Chapter VI—Craftsmanship.

2. The Revival of Handicraft.

SUCH is the theory behind the immense productiveness of William Morris as a craftsman. It is an extremely significant thing that his first practical efforts in the direction of reviving organic and homogeneous art, were forced upon him by his absolute inability to purchase any household necessities of modern manufacture worthy to be placed within the walls of the Red House which he had built for himself at Upton. Characteristically the needs of that house were the beginnings of a revolution, not only in furniture and decoration, but in the conditions of labour under which these things were made. But earlier than the building of the Red House, Morris had grown dissatisfied with art divorced from architecture. He had started to paint pictures under the influence of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, but after a little while he realized that the production of pictures apart from design related to handicraft, would have been as idle a thing as if he were to have devoted his life entirely to writing poetry.

His mind had been fired by Ruskin, and his imagination by the great organic art of the Middle Ages, so that, with one of his great energy and practical genius, the need for a house was but an opportunity for giving actual form to his previously established tastes. Morris knew quite well the difficulties in the way of furnishing a house in this manner. He and Burne-Jones had had a foretaste of them when furnishing their rooms in Red Lion Square. But he was a " dreamer of dreams," who was not content with the mere vision. No vision, howsoever beautiful in itself, satisfied William Morris. He was never happy unless he was turning his dreams into realities. Romantic as he was, the end of his romance was always practical power.

That movement, which has come to be known as the

Arts and Crafts Movement, first became conscious of itself during the building of the Red House by Morris and Philip Webb. The next step was the establishment of the firm which is now known as Morris and Company. This move was not actually initiated by Morris, but sprang out of the conversations of his circle, the painter, Ford Madox Brown, being probably the first to suggest the actual idea of an establishment for the sale of products made under the new conditions. But it was soon realized that the energy and initiative of the enterprise came from Morris who, as we have seen, eventually became the sole proprietor of the concern. The revival of handicraft attracted many young artists, and in a few years there were craftsmen working in various parts of London and the provinces, and these afterwards organized or joined handicraft guilds and societies for the promotion of their work. William Morris, however, was not a promoter of any of these organizations, although he was one of the first members (and afterwards a master) of the Art Workers' Guild, founded in 1884, and of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, founded in 1888, into both of which he threw his energies and enthusiasms along with such men as Walter Crane, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Emery Walker, Professor W. R. Lethaby, Heywood Sumner, and his old friend William de Morgan.

But his chief work for the handicraft movement lay in his craftsmanship; it lay indeed in the propaganda value of the simple, but rare, fact that he practised what he preached. The need for good design being recognized, he did not content himself with the mere advocacy of good design, he made himself a good designer. And just in the same way he taught himself craft after craft; and in some instances he had not only to revive an almost lost art, but he had to learn how to make the materials of the art, because none could be found that were free from the blight of adulteration. A good instance of this was in his revival of the craft of weaving, when, being unable to buy durable dyes, he went down to Leek, in Staffordshire, and worked at the vats until he produced what he wanted. This power of application and concentration made of him the most unique and varied craftsman perhaps of all time.

For, of the numerous crafts connected with the business of Morris and Company, there was not one of which he did not understand the theory and, in most cases, the practice also.

The rich colourings of his fabrics, with their beautiful and strong design; his tapestries, stained glass, wall-papers, chintzes, no less than the noble books of the Kelmscott Press, have all been epoch-making in their own ways. And although Morris dwelt so much in the past and sought so much to link up modern craftsmanship with that of the Middle Ages, his work is in no sense imitative. He was never a copyist. His design and the quality of his products followed the medieval tradition only in spirit. They are a continuation, a development of the handicrafts of that period, a continuation full of that capacity for growth which marked all its works. In a lecture delivered before the Trades' Guild of Learning, in 1877, speaking of ancient art he said, "Let us study it wisely, be taught by it, kindled by it; all the while determining not to imitate or repeat it; to have either no art at all, or an art which we have made our own." Morris not only gave but followed this advice. He went to the Middle Ages, to the Craft Masters of the great guilds for instruction and for inspiration, but he learnt from them how to make an art of his own, just as they had made an art for themselves.

The modern craftsman differed from the craftsman of the past in one particular way. He was more conscious of his art. His work has not that simplicity, that *naïveté* which characterizes so much of the work of the ages which had not ceased to wonder at the world. This was inevitable in the deliberate reformer. But although Morris did what he did with full consciousness of the object and meaning of his work, his consciousness was too great ever to become a pose or a mannerism. He saw the philosophic bearings between his art and life so clearly that had such a vision been possible to the Middle Ages, capitalism might never have been born, and Morris would not have had to plead with his age in strong and beautiful English words for the re-acceptance of art in daily life:—

"If you accept it, it must be part of our daily lives, and

the daily life of every man. It will be with us wherever we go, in the ancient city, full of traditions of past time, in the newly-cleared farm in America or the Colonies, where no man has dwelt for traditions to gather round him; in the quiet countryside as in the busy town, no place shall be without it. You will have it with you in your sorrow as in your joy, in your work-a-day hours as in your leisure. It shall be no respecter of persons, but be shared by gentle and simple, learned and unlearned, and be as a language that all can understand. It will not hinder any work that is necessary to the life of man at the best, but it will destroy all degrading toil, all enervating luxury, all foppish frivolity. It will be the deadly foe of ignorance, dishonesty, and tyranny, and will foster goodwill, fair dealing, and confidence between man and man. It will teach you to respect the highest intellect with a manly reverence, but not to despise any man who does not pretend to be what he is not; and that which will be the instrument that it shall work with, and the food that shall nourish it shall be man's pleasure in his daily labour, the kindest and the best gift that the world has ever had."*

* *Art and the Beauty of the Earth* (1881), *p.* 16.

Chapter VII.—Socialism

NOBODY who reads Professor J. W. Mackail's "Life of William Morris" can fail to realize that his whole career was a progress towards Socialism. It can be traced in his tastes and in his habits. On the one hand, in his love of the products of those societies which were based least upon slave labour, and on the other, in his temperamental sense of fellowship, which in his early years coloured his unfulfilled dreams of a monastic life. And again, the plaintive note of his earlier poems, even down to "The Earthly Paradise," is not always confined, as in most "æsthetic" poetry, to vague regrets at the evanescence of earthly joys and the hopelessness of mortal desires, but its complaint is against the ugliness and pain of the life he saw around him.

Morris had the temperament of a Socialist. His ultimate acceptance of its principles was, sooner or later, inevitable. This is not inconsistent with occasional loss of faith, or desire to fly from a fight in which the odds against him were so great. Such temporary reactions befall the upholders of all causes, and to argue from such incidents that Morris was never in full sympathy with Socialism, or that he had made an error which he eventually corrected, is to miss the real lesson of his life. No proper understanding of his many-sided career can be obtained apart from his attitude as a Socialist, for, as Professor Mackail points out, "His innate Socialism—if the word may for once be used in its natural sense and not as expressive of any doctrine—was, and had been from his earliest beginnings, the quality which, more than any other, penetrated and dominated all he did." *

* *"The Life of William Morris." By J. W. Mackail* (1899), *vol.* I, *p.* 338.

It cannot be too often repeated that, for William Morris, politics, no less than art, had no meaning unless they had some direct bearing upon life. His ideas upon politics, just as his ideas upon art, were first given a humanistic turn by Ruskin. "It was through him," he says, "that I learned to give form to my discontent, which I must say was not by any means vague." Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things the controlling passion of his life was a determined hatred of modern civilization.

In his early manhood he had been a passive holder of the Liberal political faith, or perhaps, to be more exact, a follower of the Radical section of the Liberal party, for with the doctrinaire Liberalism of the *laissez-faire* school, he ever had the most profound contempt. He voted with his party, when he did vote at all, and even on rare occasions attended public meetings. But his hatred of all that is vague both in politics and art was soon to sever his connection with mere party politics. Towards the end of the eighteen-seventies his lectures on art and life expressed his growing discontent with modern social conditions, and in 1878, during the opposition to Lord Beaconsfield's Eastern Policy, his loss of political faith is seen in a letter in which he alludes to "the cowardice of the so-called Liberal party."

His first step in public affairs was taken in 1877, when he founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings; and at about the same time he aided, with money and work, the Eastern Questions Association, which was formed to fight the Government on the political crisis of the moment. He threw himself heart and soul into the organization, and throughout the Russo-Turkish War was its treasurer. In the May of that year the Association issued an address "To the working men of England," written by Morris, in which his attitude towards the capitalists, who were engaged in one of their numerous attempts to plunge the country into an entirely mercenary war, indicates the ripening of his politics into Socialism. He alluded to the bitterness of and hatred against freedom and progress lying at the hearts of a certain section of the richer classes. He spoke of the way this hatred was veiled in the newspapers, "in a kind of decent language," and with what

insolence they spoke of the working man. "These men cannot speak of your order, of its aims, of its leaders," he said, "without a sneer or an insult: these men, if they had the power (may England perish rather!), would thwart your just aspirations, would silence you, would deliver you bound hand and foot for ever to irresponsible capital."

Here was a definite indication of his later Socialist attitude towards capital and labour; but as yet, like many men of his day, and like still many in our own day, he had not realized that social salvation could not come from a political organization manned and financed by a section of the capitalist class. So for a little longer he remained a Liberal. The first signs of his break with Liberalism came in the following year, during the controversy on this Eastern Question. He wanted to organize a great demonstration against the war-party at Agricultural Hall, and succeeded in getting Gladstone's promise to speak. He booked the hall and got all ready, when "our Parliamentaries began to quake." Even the Eastern Questions Association took fright. The meeting fell through, although, Morris wrote, "Gladstone was quite ready to come up to the scratch, and has behaved well throughout." The Parliamentary trickery of this affair was too much for Morris, so he closed his first short spell of public life and retired to his workshop.

It was not, however, until two years afterwards that he finally broke with Liberalism. In 1879 he was treasurer of the National Liberal League, an association formed by those working-class representatives who had become politically conscious of their needs during the agitation against the Eastern Policy of the Government in 1876. The Liberals came into power at the General Election of 1880 on a wave of popular feeling against Lord Beaconsfield's policy. Morris's faith, held to his old party now only by the slenderest thread, gave way entirely during the next year. The Irish Coercion Bill of 1881, and the gradual fading away of all promised social reforms in the mists of class privileges and interests and party tactics, turned his attitude into one of irritation and contempt. The National Liberal League was dissolved, and Morris turned from the

old political parties for ever. He became an avowed Socialist, and joined the Democratic Federation (afterwards the Social Democratic Federation, and now the Social Democratic Party) on 13 January, 1882.

Such are broadly the events which marked the final way of William Morris into Socialism. But they must only be taken as the barest outline of what must have finally happened. He was always a Socialist in the broadest sense; it only required a certain conjunction of circumstances to make him conscious of it. Among others, those events just narrated were among the more obvious circumstances at about this period of transition, and they no doubt had some considerable influence in determining him in his final step. At the same time he had wrestled somewhat deeply with the intellectual issues of Socialism. His mind had been profoundly moved by the theories of the thinkers of the new social idea. He read Fourier and Robert Owen, and he had furthermore come in contact with many of the Socialist leaders, men like H. M. Hyndman, whom he first met in 1879, Belfort Bax, H. H. Champion, and others. Besides this, it must not be forgotten that there was always something of a Socialist atmosphere, of the kind that might have been derived from the exalted Feudalism of Ruskin, among the craftsmen and art-workers of the time. Many of those who were young artists then afterwards became prominent Socialists.

Indeed, it was through art really that Morris became a Socialist. When he joined the Democratic Federation he was "blankly ignorant of economics," and had never so much as opened Adam Smith, scarcely heard of Ricardo or Karl Marx. He had, however, read some articles of John Stuart Mill in one of the reviews, in which the economist attacked Fourierist Socialism. "In these papers," says Morris, "he put the arguments, as far as they go, clearly and honestly, and the result, so far as I was concerned, was to convince me that Socialism was a necessary change, and that it was possible to bring it about in our own days." But his own account of his "conversion" through art, and his growing discontent with the civilization that made the production of the things he liked best impossible, may be

accepted as very near the truth. Speaking of modern civilization, he says :—

"What shall I say concerning its mastery of, and its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth so poor, its enemies of the commonwealth so rich, its stupendous organization—for the misery of life? Its contempt of simple pleasures, which every one could enjoy but for its folly? Its eyeless vulgarity, which has destroyed art, the one certain solace of labour? All this I felt then as now, but I did not know why it was so. The hope of the past times was gone, the struggles of mankind for many ages had produced nothing but this sordid, aimless, ugly confusion; the immediate future seemed to me likely to intensify all the present evils by sweeping away the last of the days before the dull squalor of civilization had settled down on the world. This was a bad look-out indeed, and, if I may mention myself as a personality and not as a mere type, especially so to a man of my disposition, careless of metaphysics and religion, as well as of scientific analysis, but with a deep love of the earth and the life on it, and a passion for the history of the past of mankind. Think of it! Was it all to end in a counting-house on the top of a cinder heap, with Podsnap's drawing-room in the offing, and a Whig committee dealing out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor in such convenient proportions as would make all men contented together, though the pleasure of the eyes was gone from the world, and the place of Homer was to be taken by Huxley? Yet, believe me, in my heart, when I really forced myself to look towards the future, that is what I saw in it, and as far as I could tell scarce any one seemed to think it worth while to struggle against such a consummation of civilization. So there I was in for a fine pessimistic end of life, if it had not somehow dawned on me that amidst all this filth of civilization the seeds of a great change, what we others call Social Revolution, were beginning to germinate. The whole face of things was changed to me by that discovery, and all I had to do then in order to become a Socialist was to hook myself on to the practical movement, which as before said, I have tried to

do as well as I could. To sum up, then, the study of history and the love and practice of art forced me into a hatred of the civilization, which if things were to stop as they are would turn history into inconsequent nonsense, and make art a collection of the curiosities of the past which would have no serious relation to the life of the present." *

The foregoing words, written towards the end of his busy life, broadly represent the attitude Morris always adopted towards Socialism. This is perhaps more obvious to those of the present day, who read the disturbed records of the early years of Socialism in England, than it was to his first Socialist contemporaries. When Morris declared himself a militant Socialist by joining the Democratic Federation, in 1883, the impulsion towards Socialism, which had received its first serious set-back with the failure of the Paris Commune some twelve years earlier, was just beginning to pull itself together again. In England, as on the Continent, its rebirth had come about in an acute burst of political consciousness. The Federation, founded by Henry M. Hyndman in 1881, was its first organized expression in this country. It was the outcome of an attempt, more or less opportunist, to co-ordinate the belated and grey-bearded Chartism of the 'forties and 'fifties with the youthful and sturdy Radical-Socialism then awakening among the working classes. The Radical painter was cut a few years after its formation, when it stood avowedly for direct Socialist action by calling itself the Social Democratic Federation. In principle the Social Democratic Federation was, and is, Marxist; and its aim, founded on the teachings of Karl Marx, was to urge the dispossessed class, the proletariat, into a warfare with the owning or capitalist class, with the distinct object of capturing the land and capital, and administering these for the benefit of the commonwealth. Its propaganda took the form of education towards political representation on uncompromising Socialist lines.

* *"How I became a Socialist." By William Morris.*

Chapter VIII.—Militant Socialism

WILLIAM MORRIS threw himself into the fray with that whole-hearted enthusiasm and superb energy which characterized all his work. He joined the executive of the Federation, lectured at open-air meetings and indoors, both in London and the Provinces, wrote for "Justice," which was established shortly afterwards out of funds provided by Edward Carpenter, and later on kept going with money provided by himself, and did in general any work, no matter how hum-drum, that he found ready to his hand. And this unfailing readiness to serve the cause to the full limit of his genius and purse, always marked his association with Socialism.

In these early days, the very youth of the Socialist movement, apart from the rawness and inexperience of most of its members, made dissensions inevitable. And Morris had barely been a member of the Social Democratic Federation for two years when a split came, and he and his followers left Hyndman and formed the Socialist League. The actual rupture came about at a conference on 28 December, 1884, and the League was formed in the following January. Tempers ran high and hard words were used on both sides. But some years afterwards Morris owned that he had been in the wrong. "Many years ago," he said, just before his death, at a meeting in support of Hyndman's candidature, at Burnley, "Hyndman and I had a great quarrel. Now I want you fellows to understand that he was quite right and I was quite wrong."

Socialist propaganda and action was in its experimental stage, and the various possibilities of the movement were as yet either in the wild state of "unattached" Socialism, or else creating frictions within the one and only organization that existed. And the chances of bringing the various

ideas to some sort of independent expression upon their own lines were considerably impeded by the fact that up to then Socialism and Anarchism in England had not been properly defined. The upholders of each set of ideas were indeed rowing in the same boat, with such confusion as may be imagined. The first body to extricate itself from this tangle was the Fabian Society, formed in 1883 to carry on a non-sectarian, educational, and constitutional propaganda, with " permeation " as its watchword. This society captured the least aggressive and most of the abler middle-class Socialists. The Socialist League drew away from the Social Democratic Federation the idealists and the Anarchists, and left the older organization free to carry on its work for independent Socialist action.

The actual cause of Morris's difference with the Federation was mainly political. His idea then was that the time was not ripe for independent parliamentary action. But this was only the most obvious feature of his discontent. His one distinct aim, apart from the decided political (in the Platonic sense) bent of his craftsmanship, was to make Socialists. His motto was " Education towards Revolution," and he wished to do this on frank Socialist lines, free on the one hand of the necessary intrigue and compromise of parliamentary action, and on the other of the limitations of doctrinaire teachings. The Socialist League was the inevitable outcome of the vitality of the moment. It was the natural abiding-place of those Socialists who, like Morris, fell between the two stools of the doctrinaire, " straight-ticket " Socialism of the Social Democratic Federation and the administrative compromise of the Fabians. The League had a short and struggling career and an end that was somewhat tragic.

Morris became a more ardent propagandist than ever when the Socialist League started. He was its chief initiator, guide, and financier. In 1885 he started and ran " The Commonweal," first as a monthly, and then as a weekly, contributing to its pages articles and poems and his two most popular prose romances, " A Dream of John Ball," and " News from Nowhere." But with all his fine enthusiasm and tremendous zeal he could not

interest the British public in his organization. In the following year, however, what Morris failed to do by good work was done by accident. There had been an attempt on the part of the police to prevent public gatherings at the corner of Dod Street and Burdett Road. The spot had long been recognized as one of London's street forums, and the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League determined to assert the right of Free Speech by resisting the police. This they did, somewhat mildly, but not so mildly as to have prevented the police arresting eight of the demonstrators. The next day one of them was sentenced to two months hard labour. There was a scene in court and cries of "Shame!" Morris, who was in court with other Socialists, took part in the expression of feeling, and in the attempt to restore order there was some hustling, when he was arrested for disorderly conduct and striking a policeman. He gave a direct negative to this charge, and was released. The whole affair was slight enough in its way, but it was an attempt to defend the precious right of Free Speech, and the advertisement the League got out of the incident sent it with a bound into something like popularity.

In the same year there were other similar disturbances, in one of which Morris was arrested for addressing an open-air meeting off the Edgware Road. Two days afterwards he was convicted at Marylebone Police Court for the technical offence of obstruction and fined a shilling and costs. More serious events than these took place during that and the following year. The unemployed meeting in Trafalgar Square on 8 February, 1886, which ended in the mob breaking the windows of West End clubs, stopping carriages and demanding money from the occupants, and breaking into and looting several shops, filled the authorities with something like panic. Indeed, many people thought that the events of those winter months were the beginning of a revolutionary movement. The police, at any rate, arguing that prevention was better than cure, determined to suppress as many open-air meetings as possible, and to keep a strict watch upon all street processions. These tactics culminated in the famous

events in Trafalgar Square on "Bloody Sunday," 13 November, 1887.

A meeting of protest against the Irish policy of the Government had been announced to take place in the Square, and forbidden by the police. So from a mere political gathering the meeting was turned into a monster demonstration in favour of Free Speech, in which all the Socialist, Radical, and advanced societies of London took part. There was an immense crowd and, besides a small army of constables, two squadrons of Life Guards were called out. Besides this the Square was lined with a battalion of Foot Guards, with fixed bayonets and twenty rounds of ball cartridge. The Square was cleared, and in the struggle a young man named Alfred Linnell was killed. Morris did not reach there until nearly all was over. He had marched with a Socialist column of six thousand strong from Clerkenwell Green, which had been charged and dispersed by the police in Shaftesbury Avenue.

All these events contributed to the brief popularity of the League. But Morris was gradually losing confidence in it. In the first years of his militant Socialism he saw revolt shining on the near horizon, and fully believed that a short and effective struggle would bring Socialism in his own time. His experience of the Socialist Movement of his day convinced him of the error of such a hope. It would take time, both to change the heart and develop the administrative genius of men. But he was under no illusion as to the value of social palliatives, and whilst looking upon the growth of Labourist Socialism with its decided bureaucratic tendencies as inevitable, he knew that, in spite of all the remedial social measures of well-intentioned reformers, without Socialists we could never have Socialism. "Make Socialists," he said, in his final words to the League. "We Socialists can do nothing else that is useful." Right political action would come when a sufficient number had been made.

He left the Socialist League in 1890, the year following that in which the executive had been captured by the Anarchist Group who had deposed him from the editorship of "The Commonweal." All that was effective in the

League was now centred in the Hammersmith Branch, which met in an annexe of Kelmscott House, which Morris had turned into a lecture hall. The rest had drifted into the ranks of the Fabian Society and other reform organizations. This branch remained faithful to him, and on his secession from the League it became an independent Socialist society. The League itself went from bad to worse. It became the platform of incapable and ineffective revolutionaries until it expired in 1892, when Nicoll, the editor of "The Commonweal," was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment for an incendiary article following the conviction of the Walsall Anarchists. With his break with the League, Morris became a more or less passive Socialist, confining his direct propaganda to the Hammersmith Socialist Society. For the meetings of this society he wrote and delivered several of his finest lectures.

Chapter IX.—Communism

TO understand the position of William Morris as a Socialist, it is necessary to realize exactly what he meant by a term which even now, after so many years of experience and propaganda, has no very exact meaning for the majority of people. This, no doubt, is to a considerable extent inevitable, because Socialism is an idea, and from its very nature can never be an exact science. But there is no reason why that idea should not be so defined as to be quite clear to the average intelligence. The great difficulty in the way of such a clear definition is the fact that the very essence of Socialism is an extension of individual freedom, spiritual as well as material, beyond any recognized practice in the modern world. Socialism in its broadest sense seeks to make men free by releasing capital, and all that word means, land, labour, machines of production and distribution, from the dominance of private persons, and investing it in the wills of the whole people to be administered for the public good.

All Socialists will agree so far. But differences arise when, as might be expected, an attempt is made to apply this idea to human conditions. In this process of differentiation Morris himself took a conspicuous and determined part. In his day, although so very near to our own, the propaganda of Socialism was complicated by the fact that in the minds of revolutionists even, the divisional line between it and that other social idea, Anarchism, had not been clearly recognized. And further, the difficulties were increased by the absence of any fixed ideas upon the place of insurrection and material revolt in the advocacy of the new cause. Nowadays the first of these difficulties has been removed. Anarchism is admitted to be different and even antagonistic to Socialism. Morris saw this, and, as we have seen, it was the capture of the Socialist

League by the Anarchists which finally made him withdraw from militant Socialist propaganda.

The second difficulty has not yet been fully settled. Although insurrectionism has not been finally "placed," yet, if not absolutely denied by the vast majority of Socialists, it has long since been relegated to that armoury which is locked pending extreme provocation. Socialism in England has grown out of the passion it drew from its continental teachers, and has become one with the constitutional usages of the English people. Morris, with that fine fervour which coloured his whole life, began his Socialist career, as a convinced insurrectionist, and in his early enthusiasm he believed it possible to bring about a complete revolution in a few years. But he reckoned without his material. The workers to whom he turned were unfitted by character and tradition for such a rapid change; and in the end he became a firm advocate of propaganda by education, although he never overlooked the value of force as a last resource, after the true vision and the proper integrity of purpose had been developed in the majority of the workers.

But these were not the only obstacles in the way of a clear view of the Socialist idea. The elimination of the illimitable freedoms of the Anarchists and of the possibly premature catastrophies of the insurrectionists, still left many points to be made smoother. These after a while became confined, in a great measure, to questions of propaganda, the main differences in temperament and circumstance being satisfied in one or the other of the three Socialist organizations which were the outcome of the controversies and propaganda of the eighteen-eighties: the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society, and the Independent Labour Party. It was Morris's separation from the first of these and the consequent formation of the now defunct Socialist League, that finally differentiated the Anarchist from the Socialist in England.

But throughout the history of the Socialist movement the process of defining the underlying idea of Socialism itself has never ceased. After the Anarchist question had been settled, all sorts of points as to the limitations of

personal freedom in reference to property necessarily arose, and out of these that which most affected Morris was the place and quality of production under Socialism. As was natural with one whose Socialism was the outcome of a desire to see the qualities that moved the artist applied to everyday life, he looked upon any tendency towards State Socialism and its inevitable dependence upon the standardization of production, with profound suspicion and distaste. At the same time he was not so indifferent to the difficulties in the way of transferring property from private to collective ownership, as not to recognize that an uncertain period of State Socialism stood between Capitalism and the coming of Socialism proper.

Such a period was one of the necessary evils of a change for the better. But Morris never tired of endeavouring to make it quite clear, and he went nearer towards accomplishing this than any other writer on the subject, that State Socialism was a means and not an end. Complete Socialism was Communism, and this could never be brought about by mere legal enactment, superimposed parliamentary regulations, or sudden bursts of indifferently informed humanitarian fervour. Socialism could only be realized by something like a revolution in the spirit of the workers which should back up all desire of change with intelligence, courage, and power. " Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel. If our ideas of a new Society are anything more than a dream, these three qualities must animate the due effective majority of the working people ; and then, I say, the thing will be done." *

The difference between the Socialism of Morris and that of the more recent type of constitutional and political Socialist, the type of Socialist created by the Fabian Society, will now be more clearly recognized. Morris, like the Fabian, had full faith in education towards Socialism, but unlike the Fabian he had small faith in Socialism by legal enactment. To him the impetus towards the

* *"Communism." By William Morris. (Fabian Tract, No. 113, p. 8.)*

new society must come from within, and when that is intelligent enough, powerful enough, and courageous enough, it would gain its ends. Parliamentary measures without this, be they never so well-intentioned, would be, at their very best, nothing more than palliatives or experiments. And Morris's use of the word " compel " indicates that he had not finally ignored the possible use of some sort of force. But, in the manifesto of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which he compiled in 1890, whilst deprecating " spasmodic and desperate acts of violence," on humanitarian and tactical grounds, as tending towards increasing the miseries of the poor and the difficulties of Socialists by alarming the timid, he still sees " that it may be necessary to incur the penalties attaching to *passive* resistance, which is the true weapon of the weak and the unarmed," and likely to embarrass a tyranny far more than hopeless violence can do.

In none of his activities was Morris more " out of his due time " than in his Socialism. His whole association with the Socialist movement was something like a tragedy : a tragedy born of the contest between one who was by nature a Socialist, and others who were but the advocates of Socialism. He was so much of a Socialist himself that he could have stepped out of the turmoil of the Capitalist age into Utopia without the slightest inconvenience. Training and transition were not necessary for him, he was born for Communism. He had the gifts of disinterested service and joyful work without which Socialism were impossible. That is why he at first imagined his dream could be realized suddenly. He did not realize his own rarity until his life was nearly over.

Morris's " due time " was in the thirteenth century, or that coming century in which his own Utopia will be a fact. And although he made a mistake as regards the time in which the great revolution could be accomplished, he never for a moment made any mistake about the kind of Socialism he wanted. He was never really a believer in State Socialism, or what we should now call Collectivism, with the whole machinery of production and distribution under the control of an all-powerful

central organization. He demanded complete equality of condition, so that each individual should have sufficient margin to his life for the free play of whatsoever personality and idiosyncrasy he had within him, in so far as their expression in nowise endangered a similar freedom in all. This was what he meant by equality. His artistic nature and that prodigal love of colour and design which animated all he ever did, was revolted at the regularity and sameness of such State Socialism as that imagined by Bellamy, and if there had been no alternative to this he would not have remained a Socialist for five minutes.

But there was an alternative, and this was the Socialism he advocated and, in so far as he was able, lived. "News from Nowhere," with its beautiful vision of a pastoral life of humanized association, was Morris's reply to "Looking Backward," with its vast mechanical organization of town life. Association and decentralization were the passwords of his last phase, and these were to be the means of the fullest expression of that "pleasure in the work itself," which was the underlying principle of his belief in politics, economics, and art. He was firmly convinced that the problem of the organization of life could not be dealt with by a huge national centralization, "working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible." On the contrary, he saw that it would be necessary for the unit of administration to be so small as to enable every individual in the community to feel that he was a responsible and interested party in the conduct of the state. His aim was not merely the socialization of property, but the communalization of social feeling, the awakening of social consciousness in such a way as to abolish any sense of the state as a thing apart from the individual.

Communism would realize itself in the family idea as distinct from the army idea of Collectivism. Instead of the organized regularity of battalions expressed in uniformity, we should have the equality of free groups with a margin for variation. No family would be richer than its neighbour and none would be poor, and the fullest possible freedom would exist for all. So long as there was any necessity for a central State Department its duty would

be confined to seeing that no individual allowed the expression of his freedom to interfere with the freedom of another, and to advising upon errors in the production and distribution of the communal property. Variety of life Morris considered as much a part of Communism as equality of condition, and this could only be fully attained through labour which had become art.

This idea of local administration, based upon the freedom of individuals from economic need and the tyranny of masters, would spread from the individual to the group or guild, and from thence to the wider field of the whole community, until it finally embraced the civilized world.

"Men will at last come to see," he says, "that the only way to avoid the tyranny and waste of bureaucracy is by the Federation of Independent Communities: their federation being for definite purposes; for fostering the organization of labour, by ascertaining the real demand for commodities, and so avoiding waste; for organizing the distribution of goods, the migration of persons—in short, the friendly inter-communication of people whose interests are common, although the circumstances of their natural surroundings made necessary differences of life and manners between them." * The state would be a federation of individuals, just as the world would be a federation of communities, and exchange would be friendly instead of commercial. Rivalry for profit would be substituted by the rivalry of excellence; production would be thus increased in quality, and the freeing of men from fashionable or enforced idleness would increase its quantity also. The waste of cheapness would cease, and as the anxiety of men became removed entirely from the economic arena, they would be free to test to the full the intellectual and imaginative treasures of life.

* "*Signs of Change*" (1888), *p.* 200.

Chapter X.—The Fellowship of Man

THROUGHOUT the work of William Morris there is a robust note of good fellowship not confined merely to man, a "feeling kindly unto all the earth," which is constantly finding expression in his joy in the beauty of the world and in devising means to make that beauty triumphant. This feeling is not a mild sentiment, it is a religious conviction, a part of the inner life of Morris, and, like all genuine religious emotion, it has a fighting element, a bugle call, in its composition. This was seen in his militant attitude towards the degradation of human life by capitalism. But it did not end there, he was not only prepared to fight against that; he would have been equally ready to defend his Utopia when it had been realized. Even in his own day, when he forgot the poverty of the peasants, he saw in the beautiful downs of southern England "a country-side worth fighting for," and the White Horse carved on the hill-side by the valorous men of the past, was a sign for him of the valour and courage which might come again. His heroes were dauntless warriors, vikings, and the strong kindly men of his imaginative tales, and his innate democratic sense was not outraged at the idea of service under some intrepid large-hearted hero. "The only decent official that England ever had," he said, "was Alfred the Great."

His consciousness was utopian. He lived a double life, one amidst the turmoil and chaos of a society which antagonized him at every point, and the other, his real life, in a wondrous realm of happy fellowship and bright colour, a peaceful sanctuary full of the activities of useful work joyfully performed and steeped in a large and reflective leisure. As an artist his contributions to life were contributions to such a life as this: materializations of his dream. His gorgeous tapestries and chintzes; his richly painted manuscripts and noble books with their pages

bursting into wondrous device of flower and leaf; his stained glass, his embroideries, his carpets with their beautiful intricate designs and rich colourings; his dreamful tapestried romances with their long melodious names—"The Roots of the Mountains," "The Story of the Glittering Plain," "The Waters of the Wondrous Isles," "The Sundering Flood," and "The Wood Beyond the World," and "The Well at the World's End," were not the products of our age. They were born out of their due time if ever works of man were. They are alone amidst the modern sea of vulgar luxuriousness and poor shoddy. William Morris was a magician with the power of making the stuff of dreams realities.

His imagination was a panorama of a beautiful world unborn. Every detail of his vision was exact and vivid; he actually saw with his mind's eye the Utopia he wanted. He would have compromised for some move in its direction, to be sure, but he never wavered from his own faith, his dream was inviolable, and he saw at the end of all the chaos and the reforms, his own bright commune "in England's green and sunny land." Towards the end of his life he gave the world, in "News from Nowhere," a peep into this realm, and through his magic casement amazed eyes look out upon an England grown young again; a happy land of pleasant toil and careless ease. There were no monstrous cities with sky-scraping buildings any more than there were towering personalities or organizations. The familiar backwash of humanity, as we know it in the ugliness of poverty, was as absent as the pestiferous scrap-heaps of our big cities. All was clean and dignified. Men and women went about their work with a deeper joy than we go about our feverish spells of play; and the happiness of their days was expressed in the sincere beauty of their bright and clean little towns. The puckered brow and anxious eyes of the commercial age were replaced by a joyful serenity of expression born of that freedom from care which began when work for profit was replaced by work for use. "The reward of labour is *life*," they said, and were content, and the one little rift in their happy lute was the fear that work would become extinct.

But the communistic gospel of William Morris does not end in a sweet vision of a pastoral Utopia ; that is Nowhere. And here in this grim and laborious Somewhere is work to be done. In the vision of this work his gospel grows prophetic, and out of the deeps of his love of men he raises aloft his voice in the cause of fellowship. The religion of Morris is contained in that word. "Fellowship is life, lack of fellowship is death," says the Seer of Kent in "A Dream of John Ball," the book into which Morris put his fullest utterances upon human life. And, as if moved by the depth and earnestness of his theme, this work, this simple story of the peasant rising in medieval England, represents the highest point he ever reached as a writer of prose, and perhaps the highest point of all his work as a writer. For never before did his pen weave such beautifully worded and balanced sentences out of his teeming brain. He became a prophet in the tale of a prophet, inspired by the fervour of John Ball, which corresponded so much with the passion of his own life. This small book is the great parable of English Socialism, and it is the religion behind the richly coloured dream of William Morris.

"Yea, forsooth, once again I saw as of old," says John Ball to the men of Kent, "the great treading down the little, and the strong beating down the weak, and cruel men fearing not, and kind men daring not, and wise men caring not ; and the saints in heaven forbearing and yet bidding me not to forbear ; forsooth, I knew once more that he who dwelleth well in fellowship, and because of fellowship, shall not fail though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again ; and yet indeed that was little, since, forsooth, to strive was my pleasure and my life."*

Thus strove and taught Morris ; he wore the mantle of John Ball, and saw with a full certainty that in fellowship and in happy strife alone can life be properly used. He knew for certain that it was not only in the cold "better-

* *"A Dream of John Ball"* (1888), *p.* 33.

ment " of human conditions that the new life would come about, but that in addition to this men would have to realize the essential fellowship of their lives and come to live together as comrades—free of slaves and of masters.

" And how shall it be when these are gone ? What else shall ye lack when ye lack masters ? Ye shall not lack for the fields ye have tilled, nor the houses ye have built, nor the cloth ye have woven ; all these shall be yours, and whatso ye will of what the earth beareth ; then shall no man mow the deep grass for another, while his own kine lack cow-meat ; and he that soweth shall reap, and the reaper shall eat in fellowship the harvest that in fellowship he hath won ; and he that buildeth a house shall dwell in it with those that he biddeth of his free will ; and the tithe barn shall garner the wheat for all men to eat of when the seasons are untoward, and the rain-drift hideth the sheaves of August ; and all shall be without money and without price. Faithfully and merrily then shall men keep the holy days of the Church in peace of body and joy of heart. And man shall help man, and the saints in heaven shall be glad, because men no more fear each other ; and the churl shall be ashamed, and shall hide his churlishness till it be gone, and he be no more a churl ; and fellowship shall be established in heaven and on the earth."*

* *" A Dream of John Ball"* (1888), *p.* 40.

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